

SOFT SKULL PRESS

**NEW TITLES AND
SELECTED BACKLIST**



WINTER & SPRING 2019

SOFT SKULL

MUHAMMAD: FORTY INTRODUCTIONS

MICHAEL MUHAMMAD KNIGHT

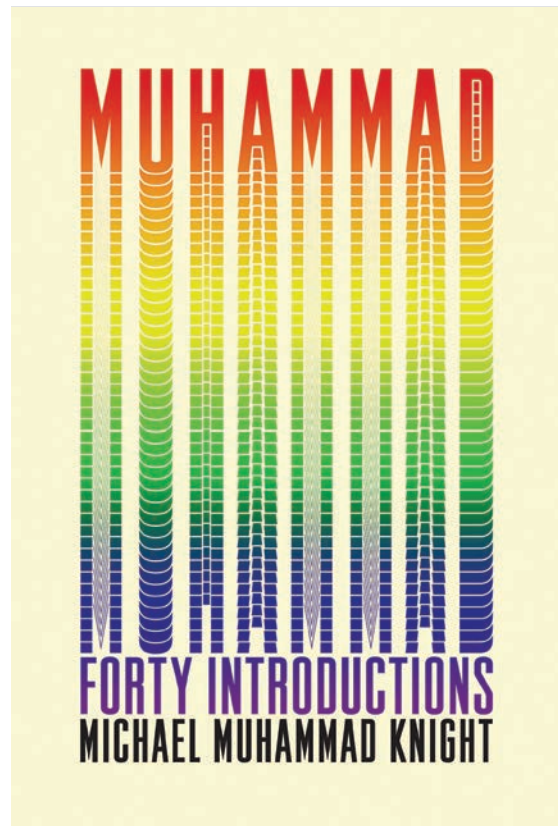
“He’s a writer only America could have produced, one whom contemporary American readers should be primed to appreciate.”

—*SF Gate*

He ranks among the most venerated historical figures in the world, as well as among the most contested. *Muhammad: Forty Introductions* offers a distinct and nuanced take on the life and teachings of the prophet Muhammad, using a traditional genre of Islamic literature called the “forty hadiths” collection.

Hadiths are the reported sayings and actions of Muhammad that have been collected by the tens of thousands throughout Islamic history. There is a tradition in which Muslim scholars take from this vast textual ocean to compile their own smaller collections of forty hadiths, an act of curation that allows them to present their particular understanding of Muhammad’s legacy and the essential points of Islam.

Here, Michael Muhammad Knight offers forty narrations that provide windows into the diverse ways in which Muslims envision Muhammad. He also examines his own relationship to Muslim traditions while exploring such topics as law, mysticism, sectarianism, gender, and sexuality. By revealing the Prophet to be an ongoing construction, he carefully unravels notions about Islam’s center and margins.



JANUARY
\$16.95
Trade Paperback
Original
Ebook: Available
Rights: US/CANADA

RELIGIOUS
STUDIES
9781593761479
320 pages
5.5" x 8.25"

Praise for Michael Muhammad Knight

“The Hunter S. Thompson of Islamic literature.”

—*The Guardian*

“A provocateur in a kufi.”

—*The New York Times*

Praise for *Why I Am a Salafi*

“Knight . . . invites readers in to ‘the desert of real Islam,’ offering a deconstructionist take on Islamic texts, tradition, transmission, and theology. . . . Knight’s ambitious scope and captivating voice make *Why I Am a Salafi* a must-read for those interested in the alternative side of Islam.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

Advance Praise for *Muhammad: Forty Introductions*

“This book is an introduction to the stunning diversity of Islam and the ways in which Muslims think, dream, and make Muhammad into their very own prophet . . . Anyone who picks up this sparkling book will be introduced to the many Muhammads who exist in the world and the ways in which they are in conversation with each other in the lives of Muslims across the globe.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“*Muhammad: Forty Introductions* is a biography utterly unique, a performance and pairing of form and function like I’ve never seen before, an entirely novel take on one of history’s most important figures. It’s a revelation.”

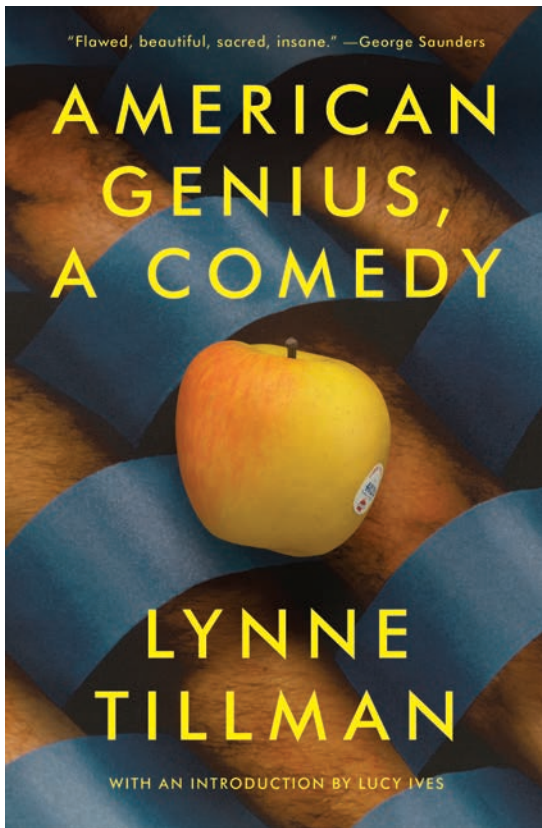
—*Scott Cheshire, author of High as the Horses’ Bridles*



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MICHAEL MUHAMMAD KNIGHT is a novelist, essayist, and scholar. He converted to Islam at sixteen and traveled to Islamabad at seventeen to study at a madrassa. His books include *The Taqwacores*, *Blue-Eyed Devil*, *Impossible Man*, *William S. Burroughs vs. The Qur’an*, *Tripping with Allah: Islam, Drugs, and Writing*, and *Why I Am a Salafi*. He is an assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

@mm_knight



AMERICAN GENIUS, A COMEDY

LYNNE TILLMAN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY LUCY IVES

One of *Vulture's*
100 Best Books
of the 21st
Century (So Far)

I won't always be here, and if I consider that, and regularly remind myself that I only have to be in a particular situation for an hour or two, whether I'm unhappy or not, I can manage it. I've been cold and miserable; I've been lost; deceived; I've been bored silly; drunk; my underpants

have been wet from nervous agitation . . . and when I have no right to speak and no involvement, except self-protection, I have become itchy, my skin a plane of heat, as if a match had been struck against it and my entire body set ablaze. But I was able to withstand it, only because I knew it would end.

In the hypnotic, masterful *American Genius, A Comedy*, a former historian spending time in a residential home, mental institute, artist's colony, or sanitarium is spinning tales of her life and ruminating on her many and varied preoccupations: chair design, textiles, pet deaths, family trauma, a lost brother, the Manson family, the Zulu alphabet, loneliness, memory, skin—and what “sensitivity” means in our culture and society. A new edition of a contemporary classic, with an introduction by novelist Lucy Ives.

Praise for *American Genius, A Comedy*

“The narrative voice is manic, neurotic, self-generative, very smart, loopy, deeply vulnerable, closely (obsessively) observant, narcissistic, and eminently contemporary. It is also very funny. Flawed, beautiful, sacred, insane.”

—George Saunders

“*American Genius* is a masterpiece. The intricate sentences, which include the alternative or opposite possibilities raised by every topic and event, provide bewitching experiences of the ambiguities of experience, always as clear as crystal, even as they shatter the crystal into luminous shards.”

—Harry Mathews

“If I needed to name a book that is maybe the most overlooked important piece of fiction in not only the '00s, but in the last fifty years, [*American Genius, A Comedy*] might be the one.”

—Blake Butler

FEBRUARY

\$16.95

Trade Paperback New
Edition

Ebook Available

Rights available:

WORLD

FICTION

9781593763114

384 pages

5.5" x 8.25"

Praise for Lynne Tillman

“[Lynne Tillman] is my secular art angel.”

—Lidia Yuknavitch

“As a steadfast Lynne Tillman fan, I am grateful for her authentically weird and often indescribable books. She gives me permission to continue to try to write such work myself.”

—Sarah Manguso



© Craig Mod

LYNNE TILLMAN is a novelist, short story writer, and cultural critic. The author of fifteen books, she has twice been a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, for her novel *No Lease on Life* and her essay collection *What Would Lynne Tillman Do?*, and is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Arts Writing Fellowship. Tillman is Professor/Writer-in-Residence in the Department of English at the University of Albany and teaches at the School of Visual Arts' Art Criticism and Writing M.F.A. Program in New York. She lives in Manhattan with bass player David Hofstra.

LUCY IVES is the author of the novels *Impossible Views of the World* and *Loudermilk*, forthcoming in May 2019.

🐦 @glossitis

📷 @tillman_glossitis



KING OF JOY

A Novel

RICHARD CHIEM

"This novel is transfixing: an imaginative meditation on emotional survival, isolation, and the beauty and limitations of human connection. I love Chiem's writing."

—Melissa Broder, author of *The Pisces*

Corvus has always had an overactive imagination. Growing up, she develops a unique coping mechanism: she can imagine herself out of any situation, no matter how terrible. To get through each day, Corvus escapes into scenes from fantasy novels, pop songs, and action/adventure movies, and survives by turning the everyday into just another role to play in the movie of her life.

After a tragic loss, Corvus finds a sadness so great she cannot imagine it away. Instead, she finds Tim, a pornographer with unconventional methods, who offers her a new way to escape into movies. But when a sinister plot of greed and betrayal is revealed, Corvus must fight to reclaim her independence, and discovers she is stronger than even she could have imagined.

Written in Richard Chiem's singular style, this debut novel is equal parts sledgehammer and sweet song, a neon, pulsing portrait of grief. *King of Joy* tells the triumphant, electrifying story of one woman's quest for survival against all odds, and serves as a reminder that resilience can be found even in our most hopeless moments.

MARCH

\$15.95

Trade Paperback

Original

Ebook Available

Rights available:

WORLD

FICTION

9781593763091

192 pages

5.5" x 8.25"

Advance Praise for *King of Joy*

"What a funny, fresh, bittersweet masterpiece—there is no one else in the world writing like Richard Chiem. From the sentence-level wizardry to the racing plot, I feel smarter just having read this. Every page brings a new set of wonders."

—Alissa Nutting, author of *Made for Love*

Praise for Richard Chiem

"Considering how much I love Richard Chiem's writing, and given how its uncanny snare and sweep of life's especially agile, prompt, messed, lithe, sharp, and heartbreaking things leaves me stiffed of summarizing words, I think I'll just nominate his work for immortality."

—Dennis Cooper, author of *The Marbled Swarm*

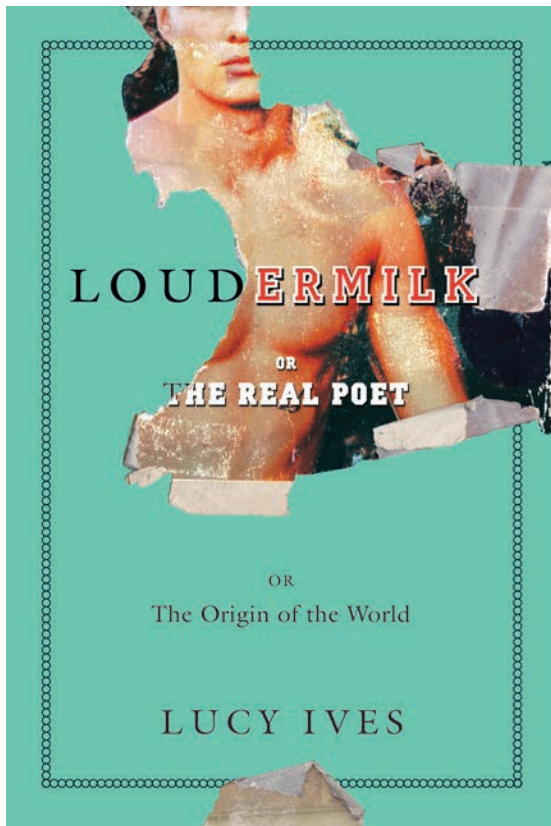


© Brooks Calison

RICHARD CHIEM is the author of the story collection *You Private Person*, which was named one of *Publishers Weekly's* 10 Essential Books of the American West. His work has been published in *City Arts*, *Vol. 1 Brooklyn*, *Fanzine*, *3:AM Magazine*, and *Moss*, among many other venues. He has taught at Hugo House and at the University of Washington Bothell. He lives in Seattle.

🐦 @giganticnovel

www.richardchiem.com



LOUDERMILK

Or, The Real Poet
Or, The Origin of the World

LUCY IVES

A tale of two idiots—the handsome, charismatic Troy Augustus Loudermilk and his unassuming, socially anxious friend Harry Rego—who, in the early days of the new millennium, scam their way into a fellowship at the most prestigious creative writing program in the country

It's the end of summer, 2003. George W. Bush has recently declared the mission in Iraq accomplished, and the unemployment rate is at its highest level in years. Meanwhile, somewhere in the Midwest, Troy Augustus Loudermilk (fair-haired, statuesque, charismatic) and his companion Harry Rego (definitely none of those things) step out of a silver Land Cruiser and onto the campus of The Seminars, America's most prestigious creative writing program, to which Loudermilk has recently been accepted for his excellence in poetry.

However, Loudermilk has never written a poem in his life.

For all Troy Loudermilk is—and, in the eyes of his fellow students and instructors, he is many things: a cipher to be solved, a hero to be championed, a rival to be disgraced—a poet he most certainly is not.

Wonderfully sly and wickedly entertaining, *Loudermilk* is a social novel for our times—a subversive look at the pieties of contemporary literature and the institutions that sustain them.

"I first knew Lucy Ives's work as a poet, and to have her prose is a gift, too."

—Hilton Als, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *White Girls*

"Lucy Ives is smart in that heartbreaking way that can make a spare, suspicious, elegant work of anti-poetry out of the silent treatment between ideas and those who have them."

—Anne Boyer, author of *A Handbook of Disappointed Fate*

MAY

\$16.95

Trade Paperback

Original

Ebook Available

Rights available:

US/CANADA

FICTION

9781593763909

304 pages

5.5" x 8.25"

Praise for Lucy Ives

"The page transforms into an experimental playground where she produces gorgeous passages of lush imagery."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Ives . . . infuses even mundane actions with startling imagery."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Ives . . . knows how to delight sentence by sentence, with turns of phrase that cry to be underlined or Tweeted . . . A voice that is at turns deadpan and warm, shot through with a crisp irony that makes it tempting to declare it the literary equivalent of an Alex Katz painting."

—*Vogue*



© Courtesy of Lucy Ives

LUCY IVES is the author of the novel *Impossible Views of the World*. Her writing has appeared in *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *The Baffler*, *Granta*, *Lapham's Quarterly*, *Vogue*, and at newyorker.com. For five years she was an editor with the online magazine *Triple Canopy*. A graduate of Harvard University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she holds a PhD in comparative literature from New York University. She currently teaches in the Image Text interdisciplinary MFA program at Ithaca College, as well as at NYU's Center for Experimental Humanities, and is editing a collection of writings by the artist Madeline Gins.

🐦 @l_cy_v_s

📷 l_cy_v_s

www.lucy-ives.com



ELVIA WILK

JUNE
\$16.95
Trade Paperback
Original
Ebook Available
Rights available:
US/CANADA

FICTION
9781593764050
304 pages
5.5" x 8.25"

OVAL

A Novel

ELVIA WILK

Bizarre weather. Unprecedented economic disparity. Artists employed by corporations as consultants. And the ultimate work of art: Oval, a pill that increases generosity. This unforgettable debut novel asks questions of empathy and power on every scale—from bodies to bureaucracies—to create an unsettling portrait of the future of Berlin

In the near future, Berlin's real estate is being flipped in the name of "sustainability," only to make the city even more unaffordable; artists are employed by corporations as consultants; and the weather is acting strange. In search of affordable housing, Anja and Louis move into a community on an artificial mountain, The Berg—yet another "eco-friendly" initiative run by a corporation called Finster. They're offered a home rent-free in exchange for keeping quiet about the seriously malfunctioning infrastructure of the experimental house.

But when Louis returns home from his mother's funeral in America, Anja is convinced he has changed. He seems to be in denial of his grief and newly idealistic, consumed by a secret project at the NGO where he works. Anja is horrified when she discovers what Louis has invented: a pill called Oval that temporarily rewires the user's brain to be more generous. Louis believes that if he can introduce the drug into

the Berlin club scene, he can finally remedy the income disparity that has made Berlin so unlivable.

Oval is a fascinating portrait of the unbalanced relationships that shape our world, as well as a prescient warning of what the future may hold.



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www.elviapw.com



CIRCUS

Or, Moira Orfei in
Aigues-Mortes
A Novel

WAYNE KOESTENBAUM

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY RACHEL KUSHNER

"If Debussy and Robert Walser had collaborated on an opera, it would sound like this."

—John Ashbery

For five years, concert pianist Theo Mangrove has been living at his family's home in East Kill, New York, recovering from a nervous breakdown that derailed his career, and attempting to relieve his relentless polysexual appetite in the company of male hustlers, random strangers, music students, his aunt, and occasionally his wife. As he prepares for a comeback recital in Aigues-Mortes, a walled medieval town in southern France, he becomes obsessed with the idea that the Italian circus star Moira Orfei must join him there to perform alongside him.

Extravagantly (and tragically) describing his hallucinatory plans in a series of twenty-five notebooks, he assembles an incantatory meditation on performance, failure, fame, decay, and delusion. A new edition of a "dazzlingly seductive" fever dream written in "brilliant poetic vernacular" (*Bookforum*) by a beloved poet and cultural critic, now with an introduction by Rachel Kushner.

JULY
\$16.95
Trade Paperback New Edition
Ebook Available
Rights available:
WORLD ENGLISH

FICTION
9781593764869
288 pages
5.5" x 8.25"

Praise for Wayne Koestenbaum

"Wayne Koestenbaum is one of the most original and relentlessly obsessed cultural spies writing today. His alarmingly focused attention to detail goes beyond lunacy into hilarious and brilliant clarity."

—John Waters

"[Wayne Koestenbaum] is a figure of this time, but he also is a writer and thinker for all time. His career streaks above this genre-obsessed, professionalized-writer moment, and corresponds instead to the history of the polymath, the public intellectual, the drifter, the infinite conversationalist."

—Maggie Nelson

Praise for *Circus* (originally published as *Moira Orfei in Aigues-Mortes*)

"The story of Koestenbaum's freaks of nature is delivered in willfully, at times hilariously debauched deadpan and makes for irresistibly twisted magic."

—Bookforum

"A deep aesthetic and intellectual pleasure, Wayne Koestenbaum's first novel is one of my absolutely favorite works of his (than which, in my lexicon, there's scarcely higher praise)."

—David Shields

"The mad genius of *Pale Fire* with the florid outlaw sexuality of Jean Genet."

—Kirkus Reviews

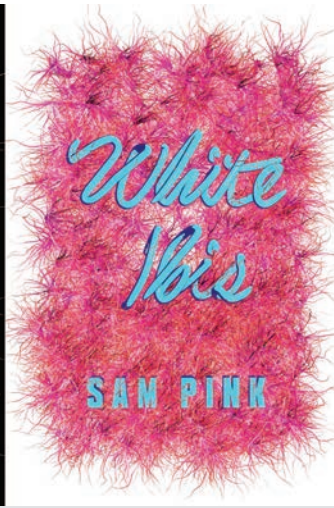
WAYNE KOESTENBAUM is a poet, critic, and artist. His books include *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*, a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist; *Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon*; *My 1980s and Other Essays*; *Humiliation*; *Hotel Theory*; *The Pink Trance Notebooks*; and *Camp Marmalade*. He lives in New York City, where he is a Distinguished Professor of English at the CUNY Graduate Center.

RACHEL KUSHNER is the bestselling author of *The Flamethrowers*, a finalist for the National Book Award and a *New York Times* Top Ten Book of 2013; *Telex from Cuba*, a finalist for the National Book Award; and *The Mars Room*, a finalist for the Man Booker Prize. She lives in Los Angeles.

🐦 @campmarmalade

📷 wayne.koestenbaum

Author photograph © Ebru Yildiz



**THE GARBAGE TIMES/WHITE IBIS:
TWO NOVELLAS**
by Sam Pink

Fiction • Trade Paperback Original with French Flaps •
9781593766818 • \$16.95 • 272 pages • Ebook Available

“The novellas are hilarious and unabashedly honest in showing how bizarre life is, how unpredictable people are, and yet how each person craves love, dignity, freedom—the fundamental needs we all share . . . His stories are unique and true and impossible to put down—what more could anyone want?”

—Taylor Larsen, *Los Angeles Review of Books*

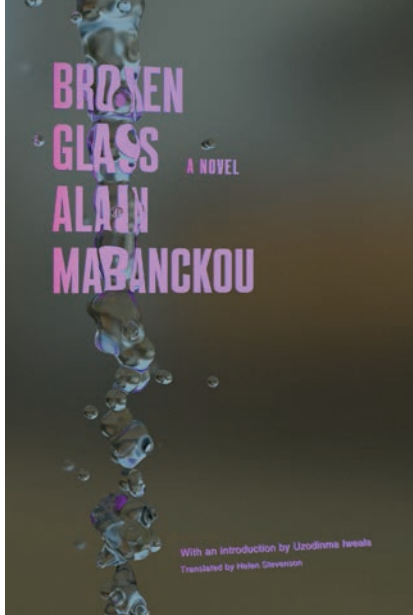


VANISHING TWINS: A MARRIAGE
by Leah Dieterich

Memoir • Trade Paperback Original • 9781593762919
\$16.95 • 304 pages • Ebook Available

“Her writing is crisp and intelligent . . . Dieterich maintains her searching, inquisitive voice throughout *Vanishing Twins*. She writes about her own reckoning with her sexuality and exploration of queer identity without becoming pat or coy, giving readers intimate access to her fears and conflicting emotions.”

—NPR

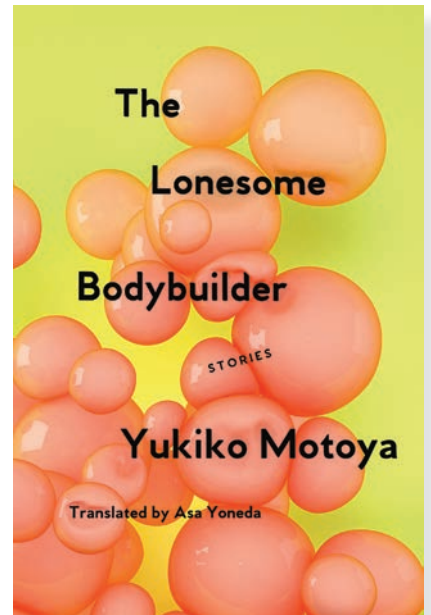


BROKEN GLASS: A NOVEL
by Alain Mabanckou
Translated by Helen Stevenson
With an Introduction by Uzodinma Iweala

Fiction • Paperback • 9781593763077
\$16.95 • 176 pages • Ebook Available

“Whatever else might be in short supply in the Congo depicted by Alain Mabanckou, imagination and wit aren’t . . . Much of the writing from Africa (or at least most of the stuff we get to see) is of an earnest or grim character, and it makes a pleasant change to encounter a writer who isn’t afraid of a laugh.”

—*The Guardian*



THE LONESOME BODYBUILDER: STORIES
by Yukiko Motoya
Translated by Asa Yoneda

Fiction • Trade Paperback Original • 9781593766788
\$16.95 • 224 pages • Ebook Available

An American Booksellers Association Indie Next Pick

“Charming, bizarre, and uncanny, *The Lonesome Bodybuilder* is Etgar Keret by way of Yoko Ogawa. I’d follow Yukiko Motoya anywhere she wanted to take me.”

—Carmen Maria Machado, author of *Her Body and Other Parties*

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For sales and marketing queries, please contact:
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jennifer.kovitz@catapult.co

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